

Sheepshead

Archosargus probatocephalus



Description:

The Sheepshead is white or black with distinctive black and white vertical lines, an oval-shaped body, blunt snout and a small, nearly horizontal, mouth. Dorsal and anal fins include stout, short spines. The second spine of the anal fin is enlarged. Pectoral fins are long and the caudal fin is shallowly forked.

Habitat:

The Sheepshead's primary habitat is inshore around pilings, jetties, mangrove roots, and piers as well as in tidal creeks. It seeks out warmer spots near spring outlets and river discharges and sometimes enters freshwater during the winter months. Juveniles live in seagrass flats and over mud bottoms.

Size:

Adult Sheepshead most commonly weigh between 1-8 pounds and are between 14-18 inches. Maximum size is generally about 30 inches long and 22 pounds.

Lifespan:

Maximum known lifespan of the Sheepshead is at least 20 years while maturity is typically reached at 2 years of age.

Food:

The Sheepshead is an omnivorous fish, feeding on invertebrates, small vertebrates and occasional plant material. Large juveniles and adults prey on blue crab, oysters, clams, crustaceans, and small fish.

Offspring:

Adults migrate to offshore waters to spawn, later returning to nearshore waters and estuaries. Females may produce from 1,100 to 250,000 eggs per spawning event.

Fun Facts:

- They have very distinctive teeth, which look very similar to human teeth, to crush heavily armored and shelled prey and to scrape barnacles from rocks and pilings.
- Sheepshead are significantly more important as a recreational species, with approximately 90-95% of the annual statewide catch taken by recreational anglers. They are a prized gamefish, although their tough skin and bones makes them difficult to clean. The bite is a distinctive tap, tap tap.
- The species name, *probatocephalus*, translates as a sheep's head, which they supposedly resemble. They are also known as Convict fish for the black and white striped coloration.